

## Introduction

*Dubai is a rapidly changing city that has undergone huge development both culturally and socially in the last 35 years. Traditional values have adapted to the influx of people from other countries and cultures that have taken up residency in the UAE and especially Dubai. It is my belief that this has had an impact on the ethos behind education and how women in leadership manage their jobs and staff. Having worked for the last three years in a British curriculum private school in Dubai, and having an interest in the subject of international management, I wanted to research female leaders in education because I believe that their experiences are unique, and that the progression of their careers are affected by various factors such as culture, values and expectations of their colleagues and the society in which they lead. There has also been little in the way of research into the experience of female leaders in this part of the world and I believe that there is much scope for exploration of the issues that arise in this particular context.*

*The main reason for undertaking this project is to explore the reasons why there are so few women in the top positions of leadership in British curriculum secondary schools in Dubai. The leadership situation here seems to mirror the situation in the UK in that women are more likely to be heads of primary schools, but not of secondary. I am curious to find out why this is the case and what the experiences these women have had in their leadership roles. My interest in these stems from the reading I have done that examines the unique experiences of women in educational leadership in the UK, US and Australia (Coleman 2002, Adler, Laney and Packer 1993, Blackmore 1999). The multi-culturalism and social diversity of Dubai also had an impact on female leaders and the style of leadership they tend towards.*

*In addition to this, these women are working in what could be described as a patriarchal society and are in the minority as leaders and I will attempt examine the constraints and problems facing women in positions of leadership in this diverse city as well the perceived advantages. Due to the amalgamation of cultures one might presume that the impact of patriarchy would be softened. Yet, this does not seem to be the case in Dubai.*

*The United Arab Emirates consists of seven separate emirates and the second largest of these is Dubai. Dubai's population consists of over 100 different nationalities and of the 1.4 million residents; expatriates make up only a small percentage of this figure. Dubai's culture is rooted within the religious principles of Islam, yet it adopts a very tolerant attitude to other cultures and is a particularly interesting example of how a predominant culture is willing to embrace others. Due to the diverse and ever increasing expatriate community, the number of British curriculum schools has increased significantly. At present, there are there are 22 primary schools and 11 Secondary schools offering education to the expatriate community of Dubai and as the expatriate population increases, so too will the need for more schools offering high quality education. As a result, there will be an increase in demand for solid educational leadership. As a result of this, I believe that there is much scope for research into how leaders respond to the challenges this cultural context presents.*

*This dissertation will be organized into four chapters. Firstly, the impact of culture on the experience of female leadership will be explored. Secondly, the leadership styles of the women will be examined. In addition to this, the impact of gender will be discussed with specific reference to stereotypes and prejudice. The perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in leadership will also be discussed. Finally, the reasons why the women believed they had been successful will be examined explored. Following each chapter, conclusions will be drawn and a final conclusion will draw together the findings of the research.*

## Methodology

*Ten women were contacted with a view to being interviewed. Two had left the UAE and two were unable to be interviewed due to busy schedules. Six women were eventually interviewed; three heads of primary, one pastoral director of secondary, one deputy head of secondary and one head of secondary. The head of secondary was in charge of a local Emirati girls' school and the circumstances of her appointment to leadership differed to those of the other women. A man could not lead in a girls' school and for this reason, her appointment and subsequent promotional path differed to that of the other women in the study. In this project, 'female leaders' are those women who occupy positions in senior management. Their positions range from deputy heads to headteachers, in both primary and secondary schools. I believe that exploring both sectors of education has made the scope and depth of my research richer and more insightful.*

*Due to the small number of subjects in the study semi-structured interviews were used to gather the qualitative data from the subjects. The questions were based on the issues that I believed to be relevant after a detailed examination of the literature about educational leadership and the experiences of women in particular. The questions were formulated with five areas in mind; leadership styles, culture, gender and prejudice, stereotyping and self-perception. The semi-structured style of the interviews allowed for certain avenues of questioning to be explored further and resulted in a level of detail that proved to be both insightful and detailed. Yet, it was necessary to have predetermined questions to ensure consistency across the interviews. Additionally, semi structured interviews allowed for interesting lines of enquiry about each headteachers' experience of gender and how it impacted on their role as managers and leaders.*

*Recording the interviews was necessary and despite the problems which can arise with retaining information in this way, it was essential for the validity of the study that the content of the interviews was recorded accurately and fully. As Bell (1999, p145) states, often the knowledge that interviews are being taped can influence the way a participant answers. In an attempt to counteract this, it was emphasized to the participants that the*

*recordings would be confidential and were to be used to ensure accurate quotation of their words in the study.*

*Once conducted, the interviews were transcribed. Although this was a lengthy process, it was essential that the interviews could be analysed and compared effectively. As it was the personal and professional experiences of the women that were being explored there was little in the way of quantitative data. The experiences of the women are highly subjective and, as a result, their narratives are anchored by their perception of their working life and the schools in which they lead.*

*The professional experience of the women ranged from 2 to 21 years. All the women continue to be in positions of seniority in Dubai and they have all had experience of teaching or school leadership in other GCC countries. All the teachers, except one, had taught in the UK and all were classroom teachers prior to their promotions. They were all British and were trained as teachers in the UK. For the purpose of this study the women were asked to recall only their experiences of working in the UAE in leadership roles.*

*Only women in British curriculum primary and secondary schools were chosen for this study. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, the leadership experience of these women is unique in that they are leading in schools that have had to adapt to the differences in culture and setting, whilst still adhering to the requirements of the British curriculum. However, they are not accountable to the regulatory bodies or government in the UK and it is the responsibility of each school to set their own standards of practice and policy. Secondly, although these women are leading in British schools there are several factors which seem to make leadership in the UAE unique. Aspects such as the patriarchal nature of the society in the UAE, cultural diversity and absence of equal opportunities legislation all seem to have impacted significantly on the opportunities women have to lead and the styles of leadership they tend to adopt.*

## Chapter One

### The Impact of Culture on the Experience of Leadership

*The purpose of this chapter is to explore the impact the patriarchal nature of society in the UAE has had on the experience of women in positions of leadership. I will begin by defining what the term 'culture' means in relation to this research and a review of the relevant literature will follow. I will discuss the impact of social expectations and the conflict that can occur when these expectations are contradicted. Finally, the impact of culture on the career progression will also be discussed in relation to the barriers that could potentially prevent women from getting to the top of their profession.*

*The literature on culture and its impact on educational administration and leadership would seem to suggest that there continues to be difficulties in defining the key concepts. Dimmock and Walker (2005) define and clarify the main issues involved in researching culture and leadership. They assert that leadership is a culturally and contextually bounded process that means it is inexorably linked with its larger environment. By failing to appreciate the complex nature of this relationship, previous research has only painted a partial picture of the situation (2005, p3). They continue by emphasising the extent to which culture has a multidimensional impact on leadership, and that this can mean that frequently researchers need to have thorough insight into a situation if they are to present an accurate representation of the circumstances in which leadership occurs.*

*In addition to this, it is stated that the effects of globalisation have had a huge impact on the extent to which culture can be seen as a homogeneous concept. With the increase in heterogeneity and hybridity, especially in more advanced and developed societies of Europe, North America and Australia it is no longer possible for researchers to examine a country's cultural make up in a singular way. Culture has become blurred by the increase in migration and the impact this has had on culture in some countries cannot be disputed. One cannot ignore the extent to which leadership has been affected (Dimmock and Walker, 2005, P8). This would seem to be the case in Dubai especially where over 100 different nationalities live and work. Many nationalities hold fast to their own*

*cultural norms here, yet the dominant religion is Islam and it dictates and influences how all Dubai's residents conduct their lives.*

*As mentioned previously, Dimmock and Walker argue that culture is a difficult concept to define. They state that culture is distinct from, but closely linked to, society. Citing Giddens (1989), they assert that society is the interrelationships connecting individuals, but culture is the glue that binds people together through a shared understanding of an accepted way of life that is distinguishable from other groups (2005, p8). What is apparent is that the definition of culture and what it represents to researchers is highly debated and it is not possible to consider it as one single, fully defined concept.*

*For the purpose of this section of the discussion, it is necessary to define what the term 'culture' means in this paper. The most applicable term is the one referred to by Dimmock and Walker (2005). They state that sociologists define culture as the values and norms held by members that distinguish them from other groups. Essentially, culture refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society and customs, patterns of work, religion and social interaction. They go on to state that the last of these is most significant when examining educational leadership (p7).*

*One specific aspect of culture that is being examined in this study is the patriarchal nature of society in the UAE and the impact this has on the experiences of women in leadership positions. In his discussion of gender and educational leadership, Grace (1995) stated that patriarchal and male power has shaped the construct of leadership for centuries. Referring to Goldring and Chen's research into the feminisation of education in Israel, Grace discusses how patriarchal structures have a tendency to endure despite changing social conditions (p187). Goldring and Chen found that as the number of women in educational leadership increased, the political, professional and bureaucratic power structures within which these women had to operate continued to be male dominated. They also found that this had a direct effect on how female leaders were perceived. They stated that the women were highly regarded at local level, yet isolated*

*from major political and policy decisions. This research would seem to mirror the situation in Dubai where that women are able to assert their decision making power within their schools, but ultimately the control is held by the male principals and the predominantly male school boards.*

*After interviewing the women, it became apparent that there was a degree of conflict in some of the interaction the women had with some of the men that worked in their schools. As in most Muslim countries, one of the important facets of culture in the UAE is the dominant role of men in society. This can be seen in the way the country is governed for example and men occupy all but a few of the positions of power. It would seem that the government is aware of this gender imbalance and in 2004, in a positive effort to promote women in the region, a woman was appointed in to UAE government as Minister for Economy and Planning. Yet, it is still very much a patriarchal society and this has impacted on how women in leadership positions are treated and how they are perceived by the wider society.*

*Despite this seemed lack of power in the public sphere, it should be noted that local Emirati women are dominant in the domestic sphere and they are responsible for caring for children and relatives, but in the world of work and leadership men continue to dominate. This would seem to be the case in educational leadership, especially in secondary schools where there are no female head teachers.*

*The women in this study were asked two questions relating to culture.*

- What aspects of the culture in Dubai have impacted on your experience of leadership?*
- Are you aware of any aspect of the culture that might influence the career progression in Dubai*

### The Impact of Culture on Leadership

*Their responses highlighted several reoccurring themes. The first of these was the social expectation that women would be head teachers in the primary sector and that it was more socially acceptable than it was in the secondary schools. One primary head teacher recalled how, in her current school, her management team were all women and there had been no men in her management team during her time as head. She believed this was due to the fact that the staff were predominantly women and that primary school teaching was not seen as a profession that men would be drawn to. She stated that it was more accepted by the wider society that women would be in leadership positions.*

*Coleman (2002) states that women dominate the teaching profession in most countries, but the older the age group of students the more likely it is that male teachers will achieve leadership status. If the majority of primary school teaching staff are women then it would logically follow that there will be more opportunity for women to become heads of these schools. Yet, it is the idea of social expectation which raises questions about why this is thought to be the place for women. This will be explored further in the chapter on gender, but for the moment, it could be suggested that the experience of the women is affected by the perceptions, judgements and expectations of the wider society. Within the UAE, local women are dominant in the domestic sphere, which includes the rearing of children. Work with children, especially pre-school and primary age groups, is considered to be within the woman's realm of expertise. Within the local education system, women are more likely to achieve leadership status than men due to the feminisation of education. It is rare that a man would be principal in this situation. This was summed up succinctly by one headteacher:*

*“ In local society the women are in charge [in education]. There isn't a man above them. It is their show they are running. Even within a male dominated place like the Emirates, it is incredible how much power these women have”*

*Headteacher, Primary*



*This could be one of the reasons why women in educational leadership in primary schools are more socially acceptable. In her exploration of the historical perspectives of educational leadership, Burstyn (1980) believes there are reasons why it is more acceptable for women to lead in primary schools. She states that in the past people assumed that women could not lead large organisations and that although women spoke with authority about running kindergartens and elementary schools, they were not be take as authorities on secondary or higher education (p70).*

*One primary head teacher highlighted one of the positive advantages of having more women in the profession. She stated in her experience the higher ratio of women had resulted in several examples of successful female role models for women aspiring to be leaders. She described how she had been inspired and motivated by the drive and determination of a previous colleague and that this had encouraged her to adopt similar traits in her own leadership practice.*

*The experience of the pastoral director in the Secondary school was one which highlighted issues of both social acceptance and respect. In contrast to the primary heads, she described how she had had some difficulties being accepted as a woman in a leadership position, not by her male superiors or teaching colleagues, but by non-European parents:*

*“If we’ve had parents in to school, especially non-European parents, they don’t seem to understand my position. I am treated differently. They respect the position, but I don’t think they accept the woman”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary.*

*One of the issues that this situation highlights is the difference in how people from different countries respond to women in leadership positions. As Coleman (2003) stresses in a wide variety of cultural contexts, leadership continues to be identified with male. In relation to cultural norms in the UAE, the pastoral director was confronted with a clash in the values of the parents she was interacting with. On one hand, it could be suggested*

*that they had some sense of reverence for the seniority of the woman's position, yet it was still difficult for them to acknowledge that a woman could hold such a position. As can be seen in the quote from the Pastoral Director, it was not stated explicitly what country the parents originated from and she was careful not to be specific, but in the context of Dubai, where many different nationalities collide, this could show that there is a tendency for women in leadership to be judged by others in relation to their own cultural stereotypes and norm.*

*In addition to this, the Pastoral Director described, with some frustration, how she had had difficulty with some of the non-Western male maintenance and administrative staff in her school. In the past, she had often had requests ignored or refused. Only when the male principal approached the men were the requests acted on. She believed that this was because the men did not expect a woman to have authority and as a result they ignored the decision making power she had in the school. She stated that the men were reluctant to take orders from a woman and sought the confirmation and assurances of the male head teacher before they would take action. If one examines this situation in relation to cultural values, two forces appear to be at work. Firstly, the men did not acknowledge the woman as having the authority. It was therefore deemed necessary for them to approach the male headteacher as he was the one perceived to have ultimate authority. Secondly, it could be suggested that by avoiding communication with the female deputy, the men were showing that they were more comfortable dealing with a man. The reoccurring idea that the woman felt she was being ignored would suggest that the men were not used to having a woman give them orders and that they were reluctant to act.*

*The headteacher of the girls' school had had similar experiences with male managers in external companies that the school had to deal with:*

*“They will talk to anyone but me about my opinion. They have an issue about dealing with a female.”*

*Headteacher, Secondary*

*In both cases, it would seem that the women felt that their leadership position was not being fully respected or acknowledged by some of the men they came in to contact with. There was also a clear indication from the women that they believed these men were ignoring their authority and, in both cases, this made their jobs more difficult.*

*Similarly, a primary head recounted how she had to communicate with the school board through the male head of the adjoining secondary school. The theme of avoidance was apparent here also. She believed this was disadvantageous because it made a simple process significantly more time consuming:*

*“It takes longer to put things into action. I relay what we want in the Primary to the head of the Secondary. He then goes to the school board, but still has to come back to me because the primary is not his area of expertise. It just goes back and forth. The school board doesn’t want to deal with women”.*

*Head Teacher, Primary*

*Yet again, the theme of avoidance is apparent. The male head teacher of the Secondary had no control over the decision making process in the Primary school and this was not his area of expertise, and despite this, the school board chose to deal with the man rather than the woman. Coleman (2003) raises a significant point which sheds some light on why this may be the case. She states that even though women occupy positions of leadership and responsibility, there is a tendency to assume the ‘rightful’ leader is male. Women are still seen automatically identified with supportive, nurturing roles and, as a result, they are not considered to be leaders (p37).*

*Yet, it could also be suggested that the men were avoiding dealing with the woman because they were more comfortable dealing with a man. Coleman (2002) refers to research conducted by Riehl and Lee (1996) who surveyed teachers and principals in the USA. Their study found that female teachers feel empowered when a woman leads them, but men do not. Coleman believes that this may have been due to men’s resistance to unfamiliarity (p88). In the case of the female leaders in Dubai, this resistance was coming not from their peers, but men on the school boards, who were not used to dealing*

*with women in leadership positions in the work place. As Coleman suggests, this cultural difference might explain why the men wanted to deal with another man.*

*Usher (1996) also emphasises the significance of patriarchy on how women are perceived. It is the influence of the patriarchal nature of structures and value systems which help to perpetuate the unequal distribution of power between men and women (p124). In contrast to Coleman's argument, it may not have been a common 'misunderstanding' which led the men, and the school board, to the male leader, but a more intentional disregard for the woman's position, despite their awareness that she was in a leadership role. Patriarchy is so ingrained in the UAE and this aspect of the culture so prevalent, that this is considered to be socially acceptable. It is part of the norms and values that influence the social interaction between men and women in this country regardless of the nationality of the women.*

*A further issue which relates to the culture of Dubai is the social diversity of the wider community and how this presented itself within the school. The deputy head believed that this had to some extent influenced her behaviour and how she interacted with students, parents and staff:*

*"You are a bit more careful. You don't make comments about religion and you are aware that everyone is different. In this international environment you have to take into account all the cultures."*

*Deputy Head, Secondary*

*It was clear that the deputy was sensitive to the fact that there were many different nationalities in the school each with their own cultural norms and values. Yet, cultural sensitivity would seem to be an issue which is affecting the behaviour of leaders in the educational context of many countries. Begley (2002) asserts that the quest for sophistication by educational leaders is not a new phenomenon, but the need for this quality has intensified in recent years. Societies have become more pluralistic and as a result, the demands and needs of interest groups more diversified and insistent (p48).*

*Although no men were interviewed for this paper, it is likely that this is not isolated to the experience of female leaders, and it is highly probable that men will also be aware of this need for cultural sensitivity. Yet, the deputy head identified it as being important to her experience of leadership in Dubai.*

*The diverse social make up of Dubai was seen to have a negative effect. Instead of encouraging equality between different nationalities and sexes, one woman believed that overtly prejudiced and racist attitudes were more socially acceptable in Dubai:*

*“I am very aware of sexism in this country. Prejudice towards gender is far more open here. It is not seen as something you shouldn’t do.”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*One explanation for this woman’s heightened awareness of the sexist and prejudicial attitudes may have been because she herself had been at the receiving end and this made prejudice a more frequent occurrence in her leadership experience. The reoccurring theme of conflict between what is acceptable to some and the accepted social norms of the culture in Dubai seems to again be a central concern to women in leadership.*

### *The Impact of Culture on Career Progression*

*One of the main reasons for the undertaking of this research was to explore why there are so few women headteachers in Dubai. In British curriculum secondary schools catering to the expatriate community, there are at present no female headteachers in mixed sex schools. There is a wealth of research which explores the reasons why men continue to dominate top positions in leadership and women struggle to be promoted in many countries (see Adler, Laney and Packer, 1993, Coleman, 2002, Hill and Ragland, 1995) Adler, Laney and Packer (1993) make the distinction between the myths and realities of why women are excluded from powerful positions in education. They refer to studies done in the UK that found that women and men are both interested in promotion, but women are more aware of, and subject to discrimination (p25). Khalifa (1989) also stated that in addition to the negative effect of sex stereotyping and discrimination, there*

*might be other factors such as family responsibilities, additional stress and lack of opportunities for career development which deter women from pursuing top leadership positions (p84).*

*In this study only two of the six interviewees believed that discrimination would prevent a woman from getting the top management positions. Most women were extremely positive and believed that this level of promotion was possible. One comment suggested that the increase in women in the local education sector would have a positive effect on attitudes to women in the British expatriate schools:*

*“I think progression is easier because they [the government] are appointing more UAE national women in higher positions”*

*Head Teacher, Primary*

*In the same positive vein, one primary head teacher stated that in her experience, women received a considerable amount of support from their colleagues and superiors if they aspired to promotion. The deputy of secondary also believed that promotion would be entirely possible if she wished to apply for it:*

*“Nothing would stop me if I wanted to because I would be applying to a British school”*

*Deputy Head, Secondary*

*It is encouraging that some of the women positive were about their chances, yet there would seem to be two concerns which arise. Firstly, the primary school heads had all been successful in their careers and had reached the top of their professions. The circumstances of their promotions were more conducive to the acknowledgement and social acceptance of female leadership. Furthermore, it has been well documented that women in Primary school education are significantly more likely to attain headship due to the gender imbalance in this sector. This would explain why these women described a path that was less resistant to their leadership ambitions. The secondary school deputy was also very optimistic. Yet, it could be suggested that she felt her chances of promotion*

*were more likely in a school where the social norms were different to those of the dominant culture.*

*The comments made by the Secondary staff suggested that it would be harder for a woman to attain top positions due discrimination:*

*“There are no female head teachers in mixed Secondary schools. I think that is a gender thing.”*

*Head Teacher, Secondary*

*“Progression is possible here, but I don’t think the gender balance is addressed and I think that could go against you. If I ever wanted to be a Head, I don’t know how supportive they [the school board] would be. I think that for women, the progression might not be as smooth”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*The impact of gender on career progression seems to be a concern that arose here and both women believed that becoming a head teacher would be significantly harder if you were a woman. Hill and Ragland (1995) state that discrimination against women exists in every culture to varying degrees of intent, severity, cruelty and damage (p15). Apart from the head of the local girls' school, there are no female head teachers in mixed sex secondary schools and this could suggest that there are forces at work which may prevent women from progressing to the top of school management. As mentioned previously, the school boards are responsible for appointing people into the leadership positions. The idea that it would be harder for a woman suggests that the members of these boards hold attitudes which may be prejudicial. If the social norms and values of the culture believe that men are more suitable leaders, then it may follow that the decision makers would avoid going against these norms by appointing a woman. Gender and its impact on leadership will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3, but for the moment it is apparent that some of the women in this study believed that being a woman would prove to make progression harder.*

### Conclusions

*Culture is a term which is difficult to define, but it relates to the shared understandings that are shared by people in distinct groups. Yet, in many countries culture has become blurred due to the increase in migration and cultures cannot be considered as homogeneous any longer. In Dubai, this is especially true. Yet, an important aspect of the dominant Muslim culture here is the patriarchal nature of society and the belief that in the workplace men are dominant.*

*The social expectations of others seemed to place women in leadership roles in primary schools where it was perceived to be more socially acceptable to be a woman and a leader and there are many more women in leadership in primary schools than secondary schools. When one looked at the experience of the secondary women it became apparent that often there was a sense of conflict when they contradicted their prescribed roles as women and stepped into the realm of leadership. Men were expected to be the leaders and this caused some men to resist women's authority, or attempt to avoid them altogether. The women in this study showed that patriarchal values are deeply rooted and, as a result, changing attitudes will continue to be difficult.*

*Encouragingly, most women believed that even in this patriarchal hierarchy, they could be successful if they wanted to. The Dubai government are trying to promote the skills of women leaders, and it was believed that this would have a positive impact on the way women in leadership are perceived. Yet, in secondary schools, leadership is male dominated. Women believed that leadership would be significantly harder, due to the social norms and values of the dominant culture which assigns men to leadership.*



## Chapter Two

### The Leadership Styles of Women

*The purpose of this chapter is to explore the leadership styles adopted by women in Dubai. This section will open with a review of the relevant literature and then progress to a discussion of the styles of leadership women tend towards. An issue that arose in this study was that there were very few occasions where women felt they had to adjust their leadership styles to fit in with the expectations of staff, other educational professionals, and the wider society. Furthermore, most women believed that to be successful they had to adopt a flexible approach to leadership and adapt to the different situations they faced on a daily basis. It should be stated here that this is not an attempt to compare and contrast male and female styles and deduce which is more effective, although the women frequently referred to their own ways of leading in comparison to their male colleagues. Rather, this is an exploration of how these women saw themselves and their relationships with others.*

*Research into leadership in general is extensive and much of the past research has been grounded in the principles of management theory (Blake and Moulton, 1964, Tannenbaum and Schmidt 1973, Newell, 1978). In his discussion on what constitutes effective leadership, Sergiovanni (2001) states that leaders are too different in preferences and personality, and leadership contexts are too different in their scope and contours for leadership to be so neatly packaged. No single strategy, style, list or formula fits all situations in the same way (p20). Newell (1978) explores what it means to be a leader. He states that leadership is the generic term which refers to processes characterised by interrelationships among people as they work to achieve common goals. He also stresses that leaders cannot act alone and that they can only function through relationships and effective communication with other people in an institution and the wider society (p222). How a person chooses to lead others would seem to be dependant on several factors and as Sergiovanni (2001) suggests there is no neatly packaged style. Yet, what is significant here is how leaders choose to deal with the people they are*

*involved with and it would seem that interaction with others is central to the exploration of leadership styles.*

*Leadership styles have been extensively researched and it would seem to be an area that has demanded much in the way of discussion and analysis for practitioners and theorists alike. As Sergiovanni (2001) states frequently educational professionals are often overwhelmed with the wealth of literature that tells leaders what to do and how to do it (p20). Grace (1995) states that analysis of differences in leadership styles can easily collapse into an endless typology of the forms of a particular style. Yet, the continuing preoccupation with leadership style signals that it is regarded as a 'real' phenomenon with important consequences for the culture, ethos and functioning of institutions (p37).*

*One of the most diverse and debated elements in the discussion of leadership styles is the identification of masculine and feminine leadership traits. There are those who assert that men and women lead differently and those who have proved that there is actually little difference in the leadership styles men and women adopt, especially in an educational context. In her discussion of masculine and feminine leadership types, Coleman (2002) states that there is a spectrum of management behaviour that includes 'masculine' and 'feminine' and it tends to be presumed that 'feminine' behaviour is more associated with women than men. Coleman (2002) refers to the research of Bem (1974) to illustrate the extent to which leadership characteristics can be viewed as either male or female.*

*Bem developed a Sex-Role Inventory which identified distinct types of masculine and feminine behaviour and Grey (1993) also explored the issue by separating leadership traits into masculine and feminine ideals. In relation to leadership styles, the study of traits would seem to allow for the categorisation of leaders into stereotypical roles. Coleman (2003) refers to transactional and transformational leadership styles and states that transformational leadership aligns itself with the feminine paradigm of nurturing and individual consideration, whereas the masculine paradigm of regulation and formality is aligned to transactional leadership. What is apparent in this area of*

*leadership is that this categorisation, and subsequent application to individuals, is inextricably linked to the development and sustained use of stereotypes of ideal male and female behaviour.*

*It cannot be disputed that this categorisation has helped to shed light on the way leaders manage their establishments, but Hill and Ragland (1995) believe that by assigning gender categories to these traits we build socially acceptable boxes that mitigate and restrict the intricate and artistic blends of leadership qualities (p49). Coleman (2003) states that much of the empirical work on women in educational leadership considers women separately from men and documents what appear to be dominant characteristics in the leadership styles of women. Women are thought to be more collaborative and better communicators (p40). Shakeshaft's (1989) work is also used to support the idea that women are more predisposed to more effective leadership traits due to the process of socialisation and Coleman (2003) emphasises that most of the research that has concentrated on the leadership style of women has tended to conclude that women are better educational leaders than their male colleagues (p41).*

*In contrast to these, there are studies that would suggest there is no difference in the way men and women lead. Adler, Laney and Packer (1993) refer to the research of Tkach (1980) which showed that women were no less qualified psychologically for positions of leadership (p8). One of the points made is that these differences are not necessarily natural, but could be a product of social construction. Coleman (2003) takes this idea further by suggesting the evaluation of women as managers is biased by social expectations that mean that the identical behaviour of men and women may be judged differently. Referring to research done in the Netherlands, Coleman asserts that there were no differences in the decision-making styles of female and male heads and that both tended towards more democratic styles (2003, p42). Similarly, in her own research of male and female headteachers in the UK (2002) Coleman found that when presented with a list of qualities men and women saw themselves as drawing on a wide range of attributes that could be considered both 'masculine' and 'feminine'.*

*Each woman was asked to describe her leadership style in three words and the question gleaned a variety of responses. This could have been due to the intentional open-ended nature of the question. The women were asked to describe themselves in their own words and there were no prompts given. This had the effect of encouraging the women to see themselves how others might have seen them and allowed for a degree of spontaneity in their answers. This mirrors the approach taken by Coleman (2003) in her study of headteacher's styles of management. She states that when faced with a pre-determined list, choices are constrained and views may be influenced (p109). What was apparent was that the women all described their styles using positive words and none of the women identified any aspects of their leadership style which could be interpreted as negative.*

*For the purpose of analysis, Coleman's identifications of groupings and categories of styles are relevant in this study (2003, p110). Coleman's study gathered data from over 1000 headteachers in England and Wales, a significantly larger number of subjects than this study represents. Yet, there would seem to be some similarities in the results. She found that the adjectives women used to describe themselves could be grouped into five styles of management; a collaborative style, a people orientated style, an autocratic/directive style, an efficient style, and a values style. When examining the women's responses a pattern seemed to emerge. Most of the words they used to describe themselves fitted into the 'collaborative style' group and the word that came up most frequently was 'consultative' When asked to give an example of her style, the head of the local girls school said:*

*"As senior management we are constantly making decisions and sometimes those decisions may not be popular. Someone might come up to you and say 'I think this is rubbish' and I will ask what the problem is and I might agree. But if I disagree, I will explain myself and usually they will agree".*

*Headteacher, Secondary*

*One head of primary was very honest about her experience of being consultative. She described how, in the past, she had found being collaborative a challenge:*

*“I have to work collaboratively with people. When you are in leadership this works to a great extent, but you are still the one making that decisions and that can be hard. I find that I want to take control and over the years I have learnt to back off. In a way, it is hard letting go of that control.”*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*As in her own research, Coleman suggests reasons why this is the most popular style for leaders. Referring to Hustler et al (1995) she states that heads do appear to realise that they should try to move towards this type of style. It could be suggested that if leaders are making a concerted effort to adapt to the pressures and demands in educational contexts, then it would be natural for them to tend towards more effective ways of leading people. This would seem to be beneficial for women. Blackmore (2002) asserts that women are seen to be new source of leadership talent because of their communicative and organisational skills, and their capacity to listen to and empathise with the needs of others (p59).*

*In Coleman’s study (2003) the majority of head teachers used words which fitted into the collaborative style and this would seem to mirror the responses of the women here. Yet, unlike Coleman’s study, the next most identified style was not a people-orientated one, but an efficient style of management. The words the women used to describe themselves were enthusiastic, organised, efficient, consistent and forward thinking. Why this would be the next most frequent leadership style is difficult to explain, but it helps if one looks at the other options that were women could have chosen. Only one woman described herself using the word ‘directive’ which is considered to be a ‘masculine’ trait and it could be suggested that the women naturally adopted ‘feminine’ leadership styles and rarely tended towards a more ‘masculine’ style. It could also be that the women considered the ‘efficient’ style as more comment worthy than the others. It was commented by all of the primary heads that they were working under a significant amount of pressure and they were responsible for much of the decision making in their school. The ‘efficient’ traits of*

*being organised and efficient would be essential if they were to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.*

*It would be short sighted to suggest that these women were not ‘people-orientated’, but what the result might suggest is that the women perceived the ‘efficient’ style to be integral to the way they carried out their leadership duties. One woman stated that she ‘did not really have a style’ and continued to say that she found it difficult to define and label how she led because she had ‘never really thought about it’. This is significant because it would seem to suggest that some women in leadership roles are not predisposed to analysing or reflecting the way they lead.*

*The issue of expectations was one that was raised by the pastoral director. She described how she often felt that both male and female staff wanted her to adopt a more aggressive approach, especially in when dealing with discipline issues:*

*“I think some staff would like me to shout more, be more aggressive and normally I would deal with things by explanation and discussion, but I think sometimes I am expected to shout more.”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*In this case it could be suggested that the woman felt obliged to adopt behaviour traits which were considered to be ‘masculine’ due to the expectations of others in her school. She went on to describe how she preferred to deal with issues of discipline in a ‘calmer, quieter’ way. She explained that her method was just as effective, but because it was not done in public, it was thought to be ineffectual.*

*As one can see in the comments made by the women, there was no reference made to the impact of the cultural context of Dubai or how this impacted on their leadership style. It could be suggested that in relation to this aspect of leadership, there were no social expectations which influenced how the women led in their school. Little explicit reference was made by the women themselves in relation to ‘feminine’ ways of leading. In his research on women in educational leadership, Grace (1995, p181) states that in his*

*study, relatively few of the women made explicit reference to ideas about feminist styles of leadership. He states that gender itself was not the only predictor of leadership style and the results here would seem to concur with those of Grace.*

### Conclusions

*Leadership style studies, especially those comparing or contrasting men and women, are extensive and there has been much in the way of discussion about how men and women lead. Some argue that women do manage differently to men, and there are those who would argue that there is actually little difference in the leadership styles adopted by men and women. They both tend towards collaborative and people orientated styles, which are increasingly being perceived as the most effective way to manage. The findings of this study supports previous research in that the women did describe themselves as being more collaborative. Yet, the women also placed significant importance on adopting an efficient style of management. What also became clear was the women did not refer to their styles of leadership in terms of their gender. This may suggest that they did not perceive their sex to be an important factor when considering how they lead others. One of their strengths was that the women believed that they adapted their leadership styles as circumstances dictated and it was clear that they believed that being flexible in their approach allowed them to be better leaders.*

## Chapter 3

### The Impact of Gender on the Experience of Female Leaders in Dubai

*The issue of gender seems to pervade many aspects of leadership. As can be seen in the previous chapter the issue of leadership style is laden with discussion about gender traits and how men and women lead. This chapter will explore the impact gender has had on how women have experienced leadership in Dubai with specific focus on two additional issues which seem to have dominated the field of gender research; stereotypes and prejudice. Firstly, I will define what I mean by the term 'gender' in relation to this research. I will then follow with a review of the literature and a discussion on the subject of gender stereotyping, the extent to which the women in the study have been subjected to it and how they have dealt with it. Following on from this, the impact of prejudice will be examined in relation to the perceived gender imbalance within senior management teams in British curriculum secondary schools in Dubai. In addition to this, I was keen to find out what the women felt the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in a leadership role were and their responses would seem to suggest that there are significant positive elements to being female and a leader in this educational context.*

*Before attempting to discuss gender issues, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term 'gender'. Gray (1993) believes that gender is inextricably linked to sexual identity. He goes on to say that one's sex is given, but one's gender is a choice. He explains that the 'sexual self' is that part of the self that recognises that one is a man or a woman and then accepts the ways in which one is a man or a woman in one's social relationships (p113). This definition would seem to suggest that gender relates to the experiences of being either male or female and how an individual believes they should act in relation to their sex. This belief would seem to determine the extent to which one acts in ways that are considered to be 'feminine' or 'masculine'. The idea that gender is a choice would also seem to suggest that individuals could choose to act in either a male or female way and could essentially deviate from what their expected behaviour might be. Gray is also asserting that the concept of society and social interaction are inextricably linked to 'gender' and it is the expectations of others that could determine the way a person acts in certain situations.*



*In her discussion of gender and leadership in an international context, Coleman (2002) asserts that leadership is a very gendered concept and that in a variety of cultural contexts leadership continues to be identified with the male (p37). Dubai, and the Islamic culture in which it operates, is grounded in a patriarchal society. Men occupy the majority of leadership positions, especially in education. This is particularly evident in the British curriculum private schools. The research done on leadership in the UK and other western societies (Coleman 2002, 2003, Adler et al, 1993) has shown that there is a clear gender bias in school leadership and this is also echoed in the context of Dubai.*

*In the past gender has been ignored by research and theories in educational management. Adler et al (1993) stress the importance of looking at men and women's experiences separately as there are issues that relate to women exclusively. They refer to Shakeshaft (1987) who argues that research on management has been androcentric bias. It makes the assumption that the experience of males and females are the same and therefore the research on males is appropriate for generalising the female experience (p6). Yet, presently, there is much in the way of sound research which looks specifically at the experiences of women in leadership (see Adler et al, 1993, Coleman, 2002, Grace, 1995) and the findings of studies show that women believe their experiences are different to the experiences of men.*

*As stated previously, leadership is a very gendered concept (Coleman, 2003, p37). The purpose of this study is to explore what it is like to be a woman in a position of leadership in Dubai. Therefore 'gender issues' are those issues that relate to women, for example equality, prejudice and stereotyping. After interviewing the women in this study it was clear that their experiences were tainted by prejudice in the form of gender biased management choices and negative inaccurate stereotyping.*

### Stereotypes

*Stereotypes pervade the societies in which we live and they continue to shape and define how others perceive groups of people and individuals. In his discussion of the gains and*

loses that stereotyping brings, Pickering (2001) states that the stereotype remains an important concept in contemporary cultural analysis (p1). He goes on to discuss the 'dilemma' that examination of stereotyping inevitably throws up. He believes that stereotyping may operate as a way of imposing a sense of order on the social world but it attempts to deny flexible thinking. He asserts that stereotypes are maintained in an attempt to uphold structures of power and to ensure that power relations are necessary and fixed (p3). Yet, he goes on to suggest that due to the constantly changing nature of the world people are continually confronted with situations which demonstrate that the power relations are neither static or unchanging. This would seem to suggest that the dynamics of stereotyping are contradictory and conflicting to a great extent. It is a natural instinct that predisposes people to resort to stereotypes and, despite what may be considered logical, people tend towards stereotypes in order to make sense of the world.

Pickering (2001) refers to the definition provided by the psychologist Gordon Allport. Allport states that the stereotype is 'an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify our conduct in relation to that category' (p10). Pickering develops this definition by emphasising that social stereotypes exaggerate and homogenise traits held to be characteristic of particular categories and serve as blanket generalisations for individuals in these categories (p10). There are several problems which arise when people are grouped together and labelled in this way. Firstly, they build a picture of people as being the same which is limiting as it encourages others to reduce people to one particular aspect of their make-up. Secondly, the behaviour or character of people is, as Pickering suggests, often isolated, taken out of context and applied to the whole group (p4). In addition to this, stereotyping has a negative effect on those subjected to it. Pickering states that the evaluative ordering which stereotyping produces fixes people into a marginal position or subordinate status and judges them, regardless of the inaccuracies that are involved in the stereotypical description of them (p5). What seems to be suggested here is that stereotypes impact on those who are subjected to them, making them feel inferior, but they also restrict the perception of the person applying stereotypes and result encourage inaccuracies and misunderstandings between people in society.

Hill and Ragland (1995) state that conflict between the role of the leader and expectations for female roles have occurred throughout history and in most cultures. They assert that the view of women leaders is weighed down by distorted images and stereotypes which portray them as manipulative, adversarial, bitchy and distasteful (p8). Yet, they also suggest that men in leadership have not had an easy escape from stereotypes either. The difference is that men have had the advantage of a wider range of images to choose from and the media have contributed considerably to perpetuating the idea that because they are male, they are probably already competent (p9).

Following from this, the idea that there are gender specific roles assigned to men and women is not a new one and much of the discussion of stereotypes revolves around demystifying the images that have been built about women and their disposition to leadership. Coleman (2002) disparagingly argues that stereotypes cause barriers to career progress and centre round the unthinking belief that there is a 'natural order' in societies and this is that men are leaders and women are subordinate. Developing this idea further, she suggests that society constructs and defines what it means to be a woman and applies stereotypes that place women in subordinate roles and aligns them with the domestic sphere and men in the public arena (p79).

The women were posed two questions which asked them to consider stereotyping.

- In your current position, do you believe you have ever been subjected to gender stereotyping?
- What strategies have you used to deal with stereotyping?

### Stereotypes

The stereotypes that the women described in this study seemed to suggest that there were several preconceived ideas about the leadership styles of women, their emotional disposition and their status in their institutions. The comments made in response to the first question demonstrated that women in leadership positions in Dubai are occasionally stereotyped in ways which are negative and restrictive. The belief that women were emotional and could not take directness was a commented on by two women:

*“They [the school board] don’t want to give bad news to women in particular. They don’t want a negative reaction. They maybe think that women get more upset if they don’t get their own way.”*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*“They [the school board] don’t like to be strong with a woman.”*

*Headteacher, Secondary*

*It is interesting that the women perceived that the image held by men on the school boards was that women were in some way overly emotional and could not be dealt with in a straight forward manner. As can be seen in the comments from the primary head, she believed that this might be due to an underlying assumption that in situations of conflict women would in some way break down if they did not get what they wanted. The comments also suggest that the men avoided dealing confrontation because they were uncertain how women would react.*

*It would seem that the idea that being emotional is a trait that is assigned to women, but not men. In her research, Coleman (2002) found that women often commented on the expectation that they needed to be ‘strong’. She believed that this stereotype was linked to the idea of tough leadership that would only be embodied by a man and that women would be ‘too soft’ and ‘unable to cope’ (p89). This would seem to mirror the situation here and could also be one reason why the men on the school boards were reluctant to deal with the female head and preferred to deal with the secondary male headteacher. As mentioned in the chapter on culture and its impact on the experience of leadership, men may tend to find dealing with women uncomfortable because they unfamiliar. The issue of assumptions is central here and it is apparent that the men on the school boards made an incorrect one in this case. What was also evident was the woman’s frustration at being perceived in this way and she commented on the fact that it made her job more difficult.*

*Another prevalent stereotype was the presumption that women had a natural inclination towards nurturing and mothering:*

*“If staff are upset then they [the men] come and get me or if there was trouble with a parent, I was seen as the one who would sort it out. You feel like you are mothering and caring.”*

*Deputy Head, Secondary*

*The experience of the female deputy is interesting and could suggest that where men have a female deputy, she is perceived to be more capable of dealing with issues which require a nurturing or caring approach. Coleman’s research (2002) found that women deputies are significantly more likely to be responsible for the pastoral and disciplinary areas in schools and this was true for the two women in this study. One of Coleman’s arguments is that the identification of women with caring roles places them in an implicitly inferior status to men, who are more likely to be in charge of curriculum and finance. Yet, the deputy did not perceive herself to be in an inferior position and she believed it was “just something she was good at”. This response would seem to suggest that women will be naturally predisposed to fulfilling the ‘sex-roles’ and in some cases this will only help to make them more successful in their jobs. Sometimes the stereotype is a true depiction of a person, and not a misguided, uninformed image.*

*This would also seem to be echoed in the experience of another woman. The head teacher of the girls’ school described how her female staff sometimes saw her as a ‘mother figure’. Yet, the reasons for this seemed to stem from the fact that the majority of the women were unmarried, far from home and reliant on the school for support:*

*“Two thirds of our staff are single women and they need looking after to a certain extent because we [the school] are their family. It’s us they turn to if they have problems. I say sometimes ‘Come with mummy and we will sort it out’. They love that kind of thing!”*

*Head Teacher, Secondary*

*The situation of the secondary head in the single sex school could be explained by examining the dynamics of the relationship between the head teacher and her staff. Gray (1993) states that the way to understand the basic organisational dynamics of a school was to recognise that people behaved in a familiar model; that is that the school is organised as a large family and the head is either the mother or father (p109). In this case the female head teacher was responding in a way that was appropriate to the needs of her staff and the climate of her school. She seemed happy to adopt this 'feminine' role, when it was required, and she felt that this made her a better leader and encouraged strong, honest relationships between her and her staff.*

*A further stereotype, which seemed to support the idea that women were not considered by others to be in leadership, was one that depicts women in a secretarial role. It was stated by two women that parents and visitors to the school had occasionally mistaken them for the secretary:*

*"They [visitors and parents] don't expect me to be quite so high up [in the school]. Sometimes I'm sitting at reception and they think I am the secretary. It is a natural thing for them to think, although they wouldn't if it was a man sitting there."*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*"Sometimes parents have come in and thought I was the registrar. They get muddled with what you are and what your role is."*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*In relation to the experience of these women, there are two issues which arise. Firstly, assumptions are inevitably made about women and this is difficult to overcome. As the pastoral director said, it is only natural for people to assume that that she would be in an administrative role because she was sat at a desk. This would seem to be a common experience and it is not unique to Dubai and Coleman (2002) also had similar findings in*

*her research. Yet, what is significant is that it was clear the woman believed that she was being judged in terms of her gender and measured against the preconceived notions that come inevitably seem to go hand in hand with being a woman.*

*Furthermore, it was clear that the woman believed the same stereotype would not be applied to a man. It would seem that when women go against the preconceived roles expected of them, there is a sense of uncertainty and confusion from others. Coleman attempts to make sense of why this confusion occurs. She states that stereotypical attitudes support men in achievement in the public domain and locate women in a supporting role. She quotes Reay and Ball (2000) stating that 'there remains an inherent paradox in women occupying the upper echelons of any public sector profession because such positioning confounds and contradicts traditional notions of femininity' (Coleman, 2002, p122.) This can be seen in the description of the experience of a primary head:*

*"I don't look assertive, but I am, so people don't often know how to take me. I am often perceived as 'girly' because I look younger than I am!"*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*Again, this would seem to suggest that a conflict in perception occurs when women deviate from what is thought to be the norm. What appears to be reality on the surface is actually a misconception. Pickering (2001) criticises the inherent nature of stereotypes and states that 'the images we create of others are reductive with most of the experiential complexity of individualised understanding stripped away' (p19) and this would seem to illuminate the reasons why these women are often misunderstood by the men and women they come in to contact with.*

*The previous observation made by the primary head also raises the issues of appearance and age. The pastoral director also commented the idea that she felt that she had been judged in relation to these:*

*“ I am a bit older. I am not in my mid 30’s with a smart suit and high heels. I don’t always look the part and I do believe I am stereotyped because of this”.*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*It would seem that stereotyping is functioning on a subjective and personal level here. Firstly, it could be suggested that in this case the woman believed that there was a notion of how a woman should look in a leadership role. She harboured her own image of what a woman in this role should look like and the power-dressing, younger woman was not one she identified with. When she applied the stereotype to herself, she felt that she was not what was expected.*

#### *Strategies for Dealing with Stereotypes*

*When looking at the stereotypes that are applied to the women in this study, it could be suggested that most of them are fairly benign. All of the women in this study stated that they dealt with stereotypes in a non-aggressive way, often using a sense of humour and occasional mild sarcasm. One woman also stated that it was important that she did not ignore the stereotypes:*

*“I usually make a joke about it, but I hope my point is made. I don’t let it go, but I am not aggressive about it either.”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*It was clear that some of the women were aware that they needed to be sensitive when dealing with stereotypes, and diplomacy was believed to be important when dealing with misunderstandings. They believed this approach was more effective and could suggest that in a culture where women are not expected to be in dominant positions of leadership a degree of tact is required when confronting the stereotypes imposed by others. One woman believed this approach was best in the UAE because people’s attitudes to women in leadership were still so entrenched and often resistant to change. By choosing to deal with issues of stereotyping in a more subtle way, the women were still effective in communicating their criticism without causing offence or conflict.*



### Prejudice

*Blackmore (1999) asserts that there is a discrepancy in the extent to which women perceive prejudice. She states that many women eschew any notion of discrimination while others regard it as something central to their experience (p60). This would seem to be the case in this study. Three women stated that they had experienced prejudice whereas three stated that they had not. The reasons for this may be to do with the fact that two of the women who did not believe they had been subjected to prejudice were in the primary sector and the other was the head of the girls'. It could be suggested that in these female dominated environments prejudice was less likely due to it being more socially acceptable for women to be in leadership roles in these contexts. In her study of women heads in the UK, Coleman (2002) found that women who led in single sex schools were less likely to be worried about issues of gender (p83) and reported fewer sexist attitudes (p121) and this would seem to mirror the situation here.*

*What became apparent during this study was that there were differences in the ways women interpreted the meaning of prejudice, but it was generally taken to mean being treated differently and seemed to be synonymous with discrimination. The women described situations that varied in the extent to which they impacted on the professional experience of leadership. For example, although she had not been directly affected by prejudice, the pastoral director felt that the lack of attention to the gender balance in the senior management team in her school communicated a negative message about the attitudes of the men on the school board:*

*“I don't think things like gender balance are looked at here like they might be in some countries. In Dubai, there isn't the emphasis on gender balance. If there's three men and one woman what does that say?”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*She also believed that the tendency of those interviewing to favour men might also have a detrimental effect on a woman's ability to get to the top of her profession:*

*“If you were against a man you would have to prove you were better than him. If two of you were on a par, I wouldn’t be surprised if the man got it.”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*Several researchers have identified that women often feel that they have to prove themselves to be better than men at the point of interview, and when they are in leadership roles (Gray, 1993, Coleman, 2002). Yet, one could argue that the pastoral director was not basing her opinions on fact and her comments would suggest that she was assuming that prejudice was occurring. Yet, she went on to describe how the school had recently appointed two new members to the senior management team and both of these were men. In reality the gender bias in this senior management team was still not being addressed, despite requests from the pastoral director for it to be considered. It would also seem that the assumptions made were not so far from the reality of the situation.*

*Further prejudiced attitudes stemmed from the belief that women were to be avoided and isolated from decision-making procedures. The experience of the primary headteacher who believed that the school board preferred to deal with the male secondary head has been mentioned in previous chapters, but her narrative also has relevance in this discussion. She described how she had accepted that their treatment of her was wrong:*

*“If I had just arrived in Dubai, I would have thought that was very wrong, but that is just the way things are in the Middle East’*

*Headteacher, Primary.*

*The suggestion that the prejudice she experienced was due to deep-rooted cultural beliefs has serious implications for women in leadership positions. If the prejudicial treatment of women is seen as the norm, then it could be that discrimination might be difficult to dispel in countries where men are considered to be what Coleman (2003, p36) calls the ‘rightful leader’. The headteacher’s implied acceptance of this prejudice is also*

*interesting, as it may suggest that women might be reluctant to challenge these types of attitudes because they felt it was futile.*

*As stated previously, it is not always the case that women experience prejudice based on their sex alone. There might also be cases where the expertise of the woman is seen to be a threat by others and, as a result, an attempt is made to isolate the woman, or ignore her contribution. The deputy head described situations in the past where she had been treated differently in meetings where decisions had to be made:*

*“There were times when I put my view forward and still they said no. I don’t think it was because I was a woman. I think it was because I knew more or the person who was leading the team wanted everything their own way. It’s not really about gender though. I think it is more to do with people being insecure.”*

*Deputy Head, Secondary*

*Women who have experienced prejudice commonly report feelings of isolation (Coleman, 2002, p80). Yet, in this case the woman did not believe that she was being treated differently because she was a woman, but because she was more knowledgeable. Her expertise was considered threatening, not her gender.*

*One of the primary heads was not specific about her experience of prejudice, but she stated that men in the corporate office had ‘been an issue’. She also commented on the fact that she had found it ‘harder to be taken seriously by men’. In an attempt to make sense of why women who have reached the pinnacle of success continue to experience problems being accepted in their positions, Adler et al (1993) state that if women do ‘enter the fray’ they are still the ‘other sex’ and will be judged as such (p16). In her research, Coleman (2002) also found that when women entered the world of leadership many described having ‘difficulties’ with male colleagues (p88). Coleman goes on to assert that these difficulties were associated with age, working with colleagues who had been passed over for promotion by a woman and with gaining credence among predominantly male senior management teams. In the case of the primary head, it could*

*be suggested that men were reluctant to accept her authority because she was 'the other sex' and was essentially an outsider, despite the fact that she had been successfully appointed and ran her school very efficiently.*

*The advantages and disadvantages of being a woman*

*As outlined in previous chapters, being a woman in leadership in Dubai is not without difficulties or challenges. Yet, all the women believed that there were some advantages to being a woman in a position of authority. One primary head believed that it had helped to foster closer relations with staff and parents because she was perceived to be more approachable. This could be explained to some extent by the fact that women are often identified with a more collaborative style of management (Coleman, 2002, p117) and as a result they may be perceived to be more open and accessible to those they work with.*

*In addition to this, two women believed that it was more acceptable for a woman to adopt a softer approach to their management of students and staff and that this gave them the advantage over men:*

*"I use being a woman a lot, particularly with awkward men or parents. You can be softer and you can use that. Sometimes male to male can become confrontational and as a woman, you do have an advantage over men."*

*Deputy Head, Secondary*

*The suggestion that women are better at diffusing conflict is one which Coleman (2002) also found in her study of headteachers (p126). Similarly, one woman felt that as a woman she could be more caring, an advantage that was also identified by the women in Coleman's study (p129). Yet, this does not necessarily mean that men do not or cannot adopt a caring approach, but it could be suggested that it is more socially acceptable for women to openly act in ways which show their ability so empathise with others.*

*This study also found that one of the advantages to being a woman was that male colleagues were often more openly supportive. The pastoral director described how the male head and deputy often showed concern for her well-being:*

*“If things in school have been tough, they want to know if I am alright. I think I get more support because I am a woman. I think it may be easier to ask a woman if she is ok. I have always appreciated it though. They might not ask a man!”*

*Pastoral Director, Secondary*

*It is encouraging to see that men in senior positions are supporting their female deputies and it was clearly welcomed in this case. Coleman (2002) believes that this could be due to the uniqueness of female leaders and the ‘special status’ they hold in education (p127.) They are in the minority, and this encourages others to be more aware of them and their needs. In this situation though, it could also be suggested that the men supported the woman because of a preconceived idea that she needed more support than a man might and were, therefore, more forward in asking her.*

*One primary head commented on the fact that she did occasionally use her feminine ‘wiles’ to her advantage, but she was disparaging of situations where this might be acceptable:*

*“You can use your wiles a little bit, but often that is just about developing relationships. A little lipstick and some cleavage doesn’t make a difference! If it does, you don’t want to be involved in that.”*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*The idea of women using, what Coleman (2002) calls ‘femaleness’ (p127) to get what they want is seen to be devious by this woman and it could be suggested that this image of women is not one which helps to alleviate the already stereotyped images that may be held by others. In Dubai, it seems that local men may be conscious of this tactic and are wary of it. Another woman described how she believed that the men on the school board thought that women were ‘wily’ and that this had encouraged them to avoid dealing with*

*her directly. Being perceived as manipulative was not an image that the two women here believed was useful.*

*The women perceived there to be several disadvantages that related directly to their gender. Firstly, was that women had to be better than men if they were to succeed. Two women stated that they had had to work much harder than their male colleagues not only to get into leadership positions, but also to prove themselves once they were appointed. Coleman (2002) states that women are considered by others to be in the 'wrong place' and as a result they are much more likely to feel like they have to prove themselves (p82). The women in this study perceived that success was linked to hard work and although none of them explicitly stated that they were trying to 'be better than men', it could be suggested that due to the male dominance of leadership in Dubai, and patriarchal attitudes towards women, it was considered to be significant disadvantage to their experience.*

### *Conclusions*

*Previous research into the impact of gender has shown that women's experiences in educational leadership are different to their male counterparts and issues of stereotyping and prejudice are common to women's narratives. The findings of this research show that often women are perceived to be overly emotional and do not take rejection and because of this men may avoid dealing with female headteachers. Women are also frequently cast in the 'mothering and nurturing' role by others. Yet, the women in this study did not perceive that to have negative connotations and they believed that it made them more successful in their positions. Stereotypical images place men in leadership roles and women in supportive positions and when this balance is disturbed a sense of confusion arises. What was apparent was that the women dealt with these misunderstandings by keeping a sense of humour and perspective. Prejudice stemmed mostly from the fact that there was considerable gender imbalances in senior management teams in secondary schools. In addition to this, women found that often they were discriminated against because they were not considered to be the rightful leader.*

*Despite this, they believed that there were some advantages to being a female leader. They were allowed to be more caring and often felt they were given more support by male colleagues. Yet, it was still believed that women had to work harder than men if they were considered to be as successful.*

## Chapter Four

### Why the women believed they were successful

*The purpose of this chapter is to get a sense of why the women in the study believed they had been successful. Although two of the women in the secondary schools had not reached the top management position of head, their progress up the hierarchy of the management structure was remarkable considering that they were still in the minority as deputies. The chapter will begin by defining what is meant by 'success'. I will then go on to examine the extent to which women had to adapt to the cultural expectations of others in order to be successful. Following this, I will explore the other factors that were perceived by the women to be important to their success. It is clear that there are factors that act as barriers to progress, but what these women demonstrate is that even in the face of adversity, one can still achieve the highest positions if you utilise your strengths and adapt to the environment you are working in.*

*The women in this study were selected because they had reached positions in senior management teams in their schools and, as a result, were perceived to be 'successful'. Hill and Ragland (1995) state that today's successful women in leadership roles are perplexing to many people because they disregard stereotypes and change paradigms (p29). The women in this study were asked why they thought they had been successful in their careers. This was a subjective question, but the reasons the women gave showed that there were several factors that they believed were crucial like personality and their ability to embrace hard work. Yet, there were also several factors that were considered to be important when leading in Dubai in particular.*

*The headteacher in the girls' school had held her position for 6 years. Her school is unique in that it educates the girls of the royal family and she is directly accountable to the Court of the rulers of Dubai. As a result, she believed that her ability to be diplomatic and flexible in her dealings with the royal court was crucial to her success as headteacher in this unique type of school:*



*“At the Ruler’s Court I can argue diplomatically and if they say no to something, I don’t pursue it. I can go with the flow and if the Sheikh says ‘jump’, I say ‘How high’! If you don’t jump when you are told to then you are on your bike!”*

*Headteacher, Secondary*

*She also believed that her ability to accept the courts rulings was vital:*

*“That is the way of the world here. If you cannot change something then there is no point. I just have to try and turn it to people’s advantage.”*

*Headteacher, Secondary*

*The repercussions of objecting to decisions or asserting her opinions were perceived to be serious by the headteacher and she implied that termination of employment could result if the court’s ideas were challenged or their decisions brought into question. This situation is one that would seem to require a unique head who understood that the nature of the power and influence held by the Ruler’s Court.*

*One of the heads of primary also implied that there were severe penalties for school leaders if they acted in a way which was considered inappropriate by the school boards:*

*“ I have been successful because I have been diplomatic. I think being this way makes it easier because the international world is volatile and you can easily be put on a plane in 24 hours if you say the wrong thing.”*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*This situation is not unique to women, yet, in relation to being successful as a women in the Dubai, it was highly relevant. These women demonstrated their ability to adapt to the cultural sensitivities of the country and the expectations of those who controlled the educational establishments.*

*Two of the heads believed that their success was due to traits which were related to their own personalities. They described how they had been ambitious, determined, focused and*

*organised and that these qualities had set them apart from their peers at an early stage in their careers. One headteacher described how she had been persistent in her pursuit of headship:*

*“I have been persistent and I was always chipping away at people. I was always in the back of people’s mind. I was always in their face and I tried to be part of the furniture.”*

*Headteacher, Primary.*

*The determination of this woman showed a level of persistence which may could be seen by some to be extreme, but it would suggest that she felt that if she was to succeed, this assertive approach was necessary. In her study, Coleman (2002) found that women tended to describe themselves in ways, which when compared to men, were mainstream and recognisable as appropriate for job descriptions. Adjectives such as ‘competitive’, ‘well organised’ and ‘assertive’ used by the women she interviewed (p133) and the findings here seem to echo those of women in the UK. She also goes on to state that these traits are perceived to be ‘masculine’ (p133). It could be suggested that if women were aware that they were in the minority as leaders they may adopt traits that they believed would place them in competition with men. Yet, the women in this study did not make any reference to their success in relation to men and measured their achievements in their own terms.*

*Two women seemed modest about why they had been successful and stated that they had ‘just been in the right place at the right time’. It is interesting that Coleman (2002) also found this to be the case in the UK, but often this statement came from male heads. In the case of women and their intentional pursuit of leadership roles, this could indicate that in some situations it might be fairly straightforward for women to get into leadership or that a degree of chance was involved. Yet, when the women began to expound on their reasoning, it became apparent that there were significantly more reasons for their success:*

*“I was in the right place at the right time. Part of it has got to be that. But I also think it is your personality. I think I was also ambitious and determined too!”*

*Deputy Head, Secondary.*

*One head of primary believed she had also been ‘in the right place when the right position arose, but she also added a poignant reflection on her experience.*

*“It is moving to think that someone else saw something in you and gave you a chance. For someone who is shy, it is quite something for someone to give you that opportunity.”*

*Headteacher, Primary*

*Although some women believed that their success was partly to do with serendipity, it would seem that their accomplishments have had little to do with luck. Their own personalities, and the perceptive insight of others to see leadership qualities in potential leaders, were also instrumental in ensuring that they would reach their full potential.*

### *Conclusions*

*The women in this study believed that they had been successful for several reasons. Firstly, they were able to be diplomatic and sensitive to the cultural expectations others. They adapted to the restraints imposed on them by school boards and were accepting of these. Persistence and determination in the pursuit of leadership was also considered to be important, especially in a context where males dominate leadership positions. Some women stated that chance and luck were crucial, but on further examination, it was clear that they had worked hard and had demonstrated to others that they possessed the qualities of a successful leader.*

### Overall Conclusions

*This study has shown that the experience of a woman in leadership in Dubai is tempered by several factors. The dominant culture of Islam ascribes distinct roles to men and women. The patriarchal nature of the culture in the UAE means that women can face challenges in their quest to reach top leadership positions in education. Yet, the women in this study seem to have risen to this challenge and have demonstrated their determination to succeed. Those who have not yet reached the highest positions of school management are confident that they could if they wanted to, but are aware that their journey might not be an easy one.*

*Yet, there would seem to be aspects of the experience of women in leadership that could be considered universal and are not unique to the educational context of Dubai. The leadership styles of the women in this study closely resemble those of women in the UK, as are the stereotypes and prejudices they face.*

*Due to the length restrictions, one of the limiting factors of this study is that there is no triangulation of the accounts of the women. Their experiences are therefore highly subjective. Further insight and understanding of the issues presented in this study may be gained by interviewing a selection of male headteachers in Dubai. This would allow for more comparisons to be made between the experiences of men and women and may illuminate, to a greater extent, the impact of gender on the experience of leadership.*

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